

**PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR A YOUTH COMMUNITY CENTER INSPIRED BY  
VISUAL VOICES, A COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHOD**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The economic struggle of the United States has directly impacted the need for quality after-school programs to provide support for working parents and their children. This support can be provided in a variety of forms, including academic support, social development, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles offered through community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club of America. **Purpose:** The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the programming at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club through a participator, arts-based data collection method guided by community-based participatory research principles and the Visual Voices method. **Public Health Relevance:** With many kids spending much time at after-school programs, it is necessary to provide positive, developing programs and activities to help prepare them to be a healthy, contributing member of society. **Methods:** Visual Voices strongly influenced the methods of this paper to actively engage youth participants on several topics of discussion: Career aspirations, favorite academic subject, favorite healthy food, favorite physical activity, how to make the community better, a current role model, and changes they would like to see at the Boys and Girls Club. These topics all directly relate to the three main components of the *Formula for Impact* developed by the Boys and Girls Club of America: Academic success, healthy lifestyles, and good character and citizenship. **Results:** Several suggestions emerged from this study in order to help facilitative positive development of youths at the Boys and Girls

Club. These include a community garden, healthier snack foods, a revised homework reward program, and community service outings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>THESIS DESCRIPTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>THESIS INFLUENCE .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>WHY ARE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS NEEDED? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>BY THE NUMBERS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>QUALITIES OF POSITIVE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2.1</b>	<b>Academic Success .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.2.2</b>	<b>Healthy Lifestyles .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2.3</b>	<b>Good Character and Citizenship .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.2.4</b>	<b>Impact of After-School Activities .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3.1</b>	<b>Why Community Based Participatory Research? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3.2</b>	<b>What is Community Based Participatory Research? .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.3.3</b>	<b>Expert Youths.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.3.4</b>	<b>Social Action Empowerment.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.3.5</b>	<b>Improved Programs .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.3.6</b>	<b>Visual Voices.....</b>	<b>18</b>

<b>2.4</b>	<b>THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB.....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.4.1	The Boys and Girls Clubs of America.....	20
2.4.2	The Shadyside Boys and Girls Club.....	21
<b>3.0</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>AN ARTS-BASED APPROACH .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>RECRUITMENT.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>PARTICIPATION.....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.3.1	Rationale .....	26
<b>3.4</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.5.1	Coding Reference .....	31
<b>4.0</b>	<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>KEY THEMES .....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1.1	Academic Success.....	32
4.1.2	Healthy Lifestyles.....	36
4.1.3	Good Character and Citizenship.....	39
<b>5.0</b>	<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMING.....</b>	<b>44</b>
5.1.1	Academic Success.....	44
5.1.2	Healthy Lifestyles.....	47
5.1.3	Good Character and Citizenship.....	50
<b>5.2</b>	<b>COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION.....</b>	<b>52</b>

<b>5.3</b>	<b>PUBLIC HEALTH RELEVANCE.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>FURTHER QUESTIONS RAISED BY THIS STUDY .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>5.8</b>	<b>FUTURE PARTNERSHIPS.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5.9</b>	<b>BOYS AND GIRL CLUB PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>APPENDIX:INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS .....</b>	<b>62</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>72</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Session Prompts .....	26
Table 2. Coding Table.....	31

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. "I want to be a doctor" .....	33
Figure 2. "I want to be a football player" .....	34
Figure 3. One female participant noted her enjoyment of singing .....	34
Figure 4. "I like my math class the most" .....	35
Figure 5. "My favorite thing is dodgeball" .....	37
Figure 6. A compilation of the participants' healthy foods .....	38
Figure 7. "Picking up trash in my neighborhood" .....	40
Figure 8. His new neighborhood.....	41
Figure 9. A shooting in Sheraden .....	41

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

After-school programs and community centers have been staples of neighborhoods for many years; however, in recent years, in large part due to the recession and the increased number of mothers of school age children working full time, these centers have become even more integral. As the economy and job market transform to a large technology-based system, technical skills and increased education level will be required in order to maintain a stable career. After-school programs are able to serve as a transitional service between school and home to provide a positive environment, which allows youths to develop as positive citizens and prepare them for success in the future. Previous research has shown that a child's after-school hours can be critical to his or her positive development, socially and academically (Joshi, Miller, O'Connor, and Sirignano, 1996). This research focuses on youths between the ages of six and 11 years old because, as shown by the Multisite Violence Prevention Project, it is important to support prosocial and positive behavior as early as possible (Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2009). The goal of this thesis is to examine the after-school programming of a community center, the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, employing a community-based participatory research method strongly influenced by Visual Voices, which uses creative arts to collect expert information on the programs and resources available at the Boys and Girls Club.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

Nationally, the Boys and Girls Clubs offer after-school and extra-curricular activities for local youth while providing participants additional resources to promote success. According to their publication, *Great Futures Start Here: A Formula for Impact*, “more young people than ever need a Boys and Girls Club, and our opportunity to make a tremendous impact on their lives has never been greater” (Formula for Impact, 2011, p.4). The Boys and Girls Club plans to institutionalize academic success, physical fitness, and citizenship through its *Formula for Impact*. The main objective of this study is to assist the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club to better understand the successes and challenges of its community center, activities, and the individuals who use its programs and services. Additionally, this study will help determine the needs and future direction of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club through method guided by the principles of community-based participatory research. The information gathered from this study will be provided to the administration of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club in order to help them plan for future development of programs.

The specific aims of this research study are to:

- 1) Actively involve youth participants of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club in research that directly relates to their daily activities;
- 2) Gain useful ideas for how the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club can better support youth for a successful future in academics, citizenship, and healthy lifestyles; and
- 3) Collect, analyze, and share qualitative results with the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club staff and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

There is also an overarching theme of this study to demonstrate the benefits of youth participation in the process and encourage the active participation of youths throughout the programming process, including planning, implementation, and evaluation.

## **1.2 THESIS DESCRIPTION**

This thesis is the culmination of four participant-driven sessions of an arts-based research method, guided by Visual Voices, to gain information from youth participants. The following section, Background, discusses the need for quality after-school programs based on the current economic turmoil and stresses experienced by working parents. The Background delves into the qualities of outstanding after-school programs, focusing on Academic Success, Healthy Lifestyles and Good Citizenship (the three main pillars of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America). The Background section next discusses the use of participant-driven research techniques, such as Visual Voices, and the benefits of using such research practices. Finally, the Background section concludes with a discussion of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, with a specific focus on the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. Following the Background section, this thesis discusses the methodology used to develop and carry out this project, including a discussion on the influence of Visual Voices, recruitment and participation of the youths in this study, and how the data was collected and analyzed. The Results section of this thesis follows and focuses on the major themes discussed through the study: Academic Success, Healthy Lifestyles and Good Citizenship, followed by a Discussion section, which delves into the application of results found through this study, how the results can be used to implement new programs, the challenges,

limitations, and strengths of this study, along with a brief discussion of what questions have been raised through this study and how the information will be shared with the greater community.

### **1.3 THESIS INFLUENCE**

Throughout this research project, there was a direct relationship with the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club and this relationship greatly influenced the direction of this thesis. Three main concepts are found in this thesis: academic success, healthy lifestyles, and good character and citizenship. These are the three main components of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America's Formula For Impact, a national strategy to promote success and are what the individual facilities are evaluated by. Therefore, all session prompts and topics were focused on these three ideas.

## **2.0 WHY ARE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS NEEDED?**

### **2.1 BY THE NUMBERS**

More than one fourth of school students are left alone at home when the school day ends and before their parents return from work (After-school Alliance, 2009). In 2009, 15.1 million kids were unsupervised after the school day, up from 14.3 million children in 2004 (After-school Alliance, 2009). As the economy continues to struggle, parents work more hours for less money, which results in an increased need for after-school programs for these children. According to the After-school Alliance, “There are not enough programs to keep pace with the rising need” (After-school Alliance, 2009, p.2) and, as of 2009, there are 8.4 million youths who participate in after-school programs.

Individuals and families of all economic backgrounds have experienced financial stress in recent years. In today’s world, it is not that parents are less committed to their child and their success, in and outside of the classroom, but there has been a significant increase in the length of workdays and a significant decrease in lack of time and money available to these families (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). There are now more mothers joining the workforce who are employed full-time and throughout the entire year (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). With both time and money at a premium, the need for affordable, quality after-school programs, particularly among low-income families, is significant.

The lack of time and money has been described as a “double bind” that low-income, working families, especially mothers, face (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003; Chin and Newman, 2003). Due to the “double bind”, these families are unable to dedicate the needed time to take care of their children, nor do they have the financial resources to pay for quality programs or individuals to assist them ((Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003; Chin and Newman, 2003). More than half of parents surveyed by the After-school Alliance stated that cost was a major barrier to after-school programs. Additionally, 25% of parents stated that the hours of operation were also a barrier (After-school Alliance, 2009).

There is a strong need for parental or role model involvement in a child’s life to promote a positive lifestyle. These individuals can be integral in supporting academic success for youths and this benefit is found across all ethnic and socioeconomic groups through higher grades and test scores, increased school attendance, and prosocial behavior and social skills (Guerra, Huesmann, & Spindler, 2003).

A critical link can help complete the system of educational support between parents, children, and success. This critical link is a quality after-school program. As the Nellie Mae Foundation states,

After-school programs can serve as a link between school and family. This is especially true in the elementary years, when parents typically pick up their children at the program. Parents often have much more contact with after-school staff than with their children’s teachers...after-school programs can encourage positive communication (p. 21)

A quality, affordable after-school program in an urban setting can bring about greater success for all participating youths.

As the need for after-school programs increases, it is important to maintain quality programs that provide an environment that cultivates success on every level (academic, social, and physical). One way programs can maintain positive programs is to involve their participants



(the youths) in research to understand what is most enjoyed and how the program can better provide for the participants.

## **2.2 QUALITIES OF POSITIVE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Quality after-school programs have the ability to “keep young people safe, support working families, and improve academic achievement and the civic and social development of young people” (Weiss, Little, and Bouffard, 2005, p.15). Additionally, these programs often offer additional benefits of being affordable, trustworthy, convenient, high quality, and interesting to participants (Weiss, Little, and Bouffard, 2005). Quality out-of-school programs provide the necessary personal attention to each child, allow the children to explore new interests, provide academic support, allow for positive social groups to be formed, and encourage individuals to take on leadership roles through building self-esteem (Weiss Weiss, Little, and Bouffard, 2005). It is important to note that the combination of many inputs (biological and physiological growth, social expectations, and environment) creates an extremely risky adolescence period and, therefore, it is necessary to have a multidisciplinary approach to providing a positive, quality after-school program (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). This can be achieved through several different measures, most notably, a positive environment that promotes academic success and positive lifestyles through structured free time.

### **2.2.1 Academic Success**

One component that is often related to academic success is structured free time. There is a longtime link between television viewing (and other non-stimulating activities) and poor academic performance (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). In addition to decreases in academic achievement, youths who spend more time performing non-stimulating activities are more likely to be in poorer overall health and have more behavior problems (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003).

With increasing competitiveness pressuring students to perform well on standardized tests and an increased focus on grades, it is imperative to decrease non-stimulating activities and increase involvement in activities that promote critical thinking, physical exertion, and overall success. Constructive use of free time by youths has been associated with academic achievement and progress, higher self-esteem, prosocial actions/behaviors, and decreased risk-taking behavior (Weiss, Little, and Bouffard, 2005). Additionally, “there is strong, compelling evidence that organized structured activities for youngsters play a valuable and highly valued role in student’s lives” (Public Agenda and The Wallace Foundation, 2004, p.15), and that school-age children’s academic performance is enhanced by attending formal child-care programs of at least adequate quality (Joshi et al., 1996).

It is critical to promote a culture within after-school programs that is conducive to academic achievement. As the Nellie Mae Foundation reports, after-school programs cannot change students’ school experiences, but they are able to provide additional support that can be personalized to each individual’s interests and needs (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). Additionally, the Nellie Mae Foundation cites that after-school programs also have the ability to promote personal attention, especially for individuals who are known to be struggling in the classroom (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003) and by providing an additional 20-35 hours a week of

additional, constructive activities, students perform better academically (Chung, 200). By providing such services, positive after-school programs can help combat the alarming rate of 1,200,000 youths dropping out of school annually (Formula for Impact, 2011).

### **2.2.2 Healthy Lifestyles**

It is important for youths to develop socially as well as academically. Behavioral issues and antisocial behaviors at a young age (middle school) can be strong predictors for future involvement in crime and risk behaviors. These “early starters” who show persistent antisocial and conduct problems through middle childhood, are at a higher risk to perform more serious criminal offenses (Shaw, Gilliom, Ingoldsby, and Nagin, 2003).

The Harvard Family Research Project has shown that after-school programs have the ability to increase prosocial actions and provide preventative measures in protecting young adolescents from risky lifestyles. According to the Harvard Family Research Project, “participation in after-school programs is associated with decrease behavioral problems; improved social and communication skills and/or relationships with other; increased self-confidence; self-esteem, and self-efficacy” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008, p.2). This is an important issue with 47% of school-age children reporting they were bullied, it is necessary to remove these negative actions from an after-school program due to the vulnerability of youth participants (Formula for Impact, 2011). Additionally, participation in after-school programs has been shown to be protective against drug and alcohol use, violent behavior, and juvenile crime (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008).

The Harvard Family Research Project additionally supports the importance of structured free time, stating, “participation in after-school programs can contribute to healthy lifestyles and

increased knowledge of nutrition and exercise” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008, p.2). In a society in which childhood obesity is a major issue with one out of three children is considered overweight or obese (Briefel, Crepinsek, Cabili, Wilson, and Gleason, 2009), increasing knowledge and awareness about health and wellness regarding food choices, activities, and body image can help support a healthy lifestyle at a young age and potentially provide a strong structure for future healthy lifestyles.

### **2.2.3 Good Character and Citizenship**

For the purpose of this study “Good Character and Citizenship” are defined as positive characteristics that require little or no discipline and traits that are found in individuals who actively assist the community. “Good Character and Citizenship” is considered a goal that is “integral to a young person’s ability to become a productive, caring, and responsible citizen”, according to the Boys and Girls Club of America (Formula for Impact, 2011, p.9).

Youths in elementary and middle schools are in an extremely vulnerable stage and therefore surrounding them with a positive environment is key to their development into productive, caring, and responsible citizens (Formula For Impact, 2011). The Multisite Violence Prevention Project has shown that early adolescents are extremely susceptible to forming bad habits based on their surrounding environment and peer group (Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2009). Furthermore, according to the Nellie Mae Foundation, “during early adolescence, young people are exquisitely sensitive to peers and peer group sentiment... In their quest for an independent identity, young adolescents experience an increased need for belonging with a peer group” (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003, p.4); and during the after-school hours,

juvenile crime reaches its highest mark for those not under direct adult supervision (Chung, 2000).

Through cultivating a positive environment, after-school programs can encourage all individuals to be positive and prosocial members of society; therefore, youths will be surrounded by other youths who are behaving in a manner that will prepare them for success in the future. According to D'Amico, Metrik and Brown (2001), it is important to maintain a positive environment surrounding academics because when a student's friends do not support, and even belittle, academic progress, motivation tends not to work effectively. When a positive environment is maintained and sustained, an encouraging culture focused on positive, prosocial behaviors within the program or center can be formed.

The implementation and cultivation of a positive environment encouraging positive developmental outcomes, young individuals are able to explore new avenues of interest and have the ability to become more autonomous through developing as leaders. Previous research has shown that early adolescents crave responsibility and independence and that many youths will find outlets to develop this, whether positive (school and program leadership) or negative (gang membership) (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003).

When reflecting on past experiences, according to Nellie Mae Foundation, individuals are more likely to remember activities outside of the classroom as events that helped shape them as an individual (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003). Therefore it is important that these out-of-school activities be ones that promote positive, prosocial activities in an effort to help prepare individuals for a successful future. After-school programs can play a major role in "engaging youth in the learning process by providing opportunities to explore interests, gain competency,

solve problems, assume leadership roles, and become involved in improve their communities” (Nellie Mae Foundation, 2003, p.2).

#### **2.2.4 Impact of After-School Activities**

Dur;al, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) performed the first meta-analysis of after-school programs that aim at improving personal and social aspects of the participants’ lives, including academic success and social development (citizenship and good character). In this analysis of 68 studies previously performed, the authors showed a significant effect on the participants’ self-perceptions, school bonding, positive social behaviors, achievement test scores, and school grades. Additionally, Jordan and Nettles have concluded that, across all independent variables, involvement in structured activities and time spent with adults show positive attributes while hanging out with friends showed consistent negative attributes (2000). To further support after-school programs and their positive effects on academic achievement, Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown (2004) conclude, “After-school homework programs can provide students with structure, supervision, academic assistance, and the opportunity to learn study skills” (224). Continuing on the authors have concluded that, when programs are at their best, the programs can also help them feel more bonded to school, reduce family stress, and develop attitudes and skills to allow students to be more successful in the future (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown, 2004).

Furthermore, it is important to note that after-school programs have the opportunity to encourage healthy lifestyles, especially in regard to physical activities and a healthy diet. As Trost, Rosenkranz, and Dzewaltowski state, “With opportunities for physical activity during the school day rapidly diminishing, after-school programs have become a key behavioral setting to

promote physical activity and prevent overweight in children and adolescents” (626). While noting the limited sample of studies performed, Beets, Beighle, Erwin, and Huberty (2009) show, through a meta-analysis, that after-school programs that integrate physical activity can be effective in improving multiple levels of physical activity including: physical fitness, body composition, and blood lipid profiles.

## **2.3 COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**

### **2.3.1 Why Community Based Participatory Research?**

There are many different and well-developed research techniques that focus on quantitative results through surveys, program participation numbers, or revenue for specific programs. Many evaluative studies focus on programs that directly affect children and youth participants, yet researchers rarely include the caregivers of their participants or the participants themselves. Yonas, Burke, Rak, Bennett, Kelly, and Gielen (2009) have shown the importance of involving youth participants in research that directly impacts their lives.

Youth participants have reported that they are weary of “outsiders” who come in for a day to perform their research or program and then leave at the end of the day never to see the participants again. Experiences of these research processes reveal that youths will be much more trusting and willing to participate with staff members and volunteers who have been spending extended amounts of time with them.

Based on these ideas, the researchers of this study decided that a process in which the youths are actively engaged would be the most beneficial route. Furthermore, based on

observations and discussions between researchers and Boys and Girls Club staff, the researchers decided against using a survey. Through the implementation of an active research process, a relationship can be formed between the researcher and the participants and allow them the needed time to trust the researcher as well as to thoughtfully speak on the topics of discussion.

### **2.3.2 What is Community Based Participatory Research?**

Community Based Participatory Research, or CBPR, is defined by Minkler and Wallerstein (2010) as “a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each bring” (p. 6), hinges on the participation of the community central to the study (Butterfoss, 2006), and focuses on increasing knowledge and understanding of topic or phenomenon (Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker, 2001). For this research project, the main focus was to gain a better understanding of how the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club addresses three main criteria: academic success, healthy lifestyles, and good character and citizenship. Minkler and Wallerstein go further by reinforcing the idea of beginning with a topic of importance for the community with the goal of using knowledge and action to improve the health of the community (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2010).

Community participation in health research has gained attention because, as Butterfoss (2006) states

the general experience of practitioners and limited evidence from participatory evaluations suggest that, when organizers and researchers seek out and involve community members in their efforts, health outcomes are better realized and maintenance of programs is enhanced (p. 323)



Therefore, by using a community engaged approach to explore the successes and challenges of programs at the Boys and Girls Club in Shadyside, the researchers and staff can grasp a true understanding from the members on what results in active participation in their activities.

It is important to note that community-based participatory research is a general approach of conducting research with varying levels of community participation. Arnstein (1969) represents the different levels of community, or citizen, engagement as rungs on a ladder (p. 217). Starting at the bottom of the ladder there is no participation, but simply using the community to gather information and nothing more. Moving up the ladder, participation increases from informing to complete citizen control. Under the community-based participatory research approach, there are many different methods that employ a variety of different

This study employed Visual Voices, a participatory method that combines the Placation and Partnership rungs on Arnstein's *Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation* because this project empowers the community members to have a voice and an outlet to share their thoughts, while encouraging conversation between those with the power to make changes and the insights of youth experts; however, the administration of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club still retains all decision-making power (Arnstein, 1969).

### **2.3.3 Expert Youths**

At the Boys and Girls Club, the participants, the youth, are the experts. The youths are the individuals who partake in the daily activities and programs and have the best understanding of how these activities and programs can be altered to better align with the ideals and interests of youths involved, while still integrating and highlighting the learning and development

components of the activities and programs as determined by the goals of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club.

The participation of youths in program implementation and evaluation is a process in which the youths are directly involved in producing and assessing programs that have an affect on their lives on a daily basis (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002). The youths of the Boys and Girls Club of Shadyside are the individuals with the best insight into what works for a program and what are barriers to participation; they are the experts in this field.

### **2.3.4 Social Action Empowerment**

In addition to acknowledging the fact that the youths are the experts in the field of after-school programming, involving them as equal participants throughout program planning, implementation, and evaluation can help educate and inspire them to become agents of change for themselves and their community.

The Community Network for Youth Development (2001) has created a guide for engaging young people in after-school programming and through this guide, they have noted that,

Resiliency research affirms that young people's meaningful participation serves as a core protective factor for young people...regardless of their individual circumstances, meaningful participation helps young people overcome risks and obstacles in their lives (p. 88).

Through the integration of youths in the programming process, local club and community leaders are able to inspire and excite local youths in their surrounding environment, which encourages youths to have a voice and be an advocate for themselves and their community. These effects can clearly be seen throughout the involvement of youth because when young people are able to

participate in a meaningful way, they feel a sense of ownership and belonging within the program, thus leading to an experience of “making a difference” in their local community (Community Network for Youth Development, 2001).

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) have stated that there can be multiple, positive outcomes when youths participate in community program planning. These outcomes include:

1. Developing knowledge for social action;
2. Enabling young people to exercise their rights;
3. Allowing young people to share in the democratization of knowledge;
4. Preparing young people to actively participate; and
5. Strengthening the social development of young people.

In addition to the impact on youths participating in this process, the programs will become more effective from such interactions.

By engaging youths and giving them a voice in the programs that they attend, programs are cultivating leaders for tomorrow and encouraging of new and novel programs, stronger communities, and a stronger self-esteem amongst the young by supporting them, not controlling them (Murdock, Paterson, Lee, and Gatmaitan, 2011).

### **2.3.5 Improved Programs**

As with any community program, it is important to understand what the needs of the community being served are and the best way to go about implementing programs that can benefit such a community. The Community Network for Youth Development (2001) describes why programs are improved when harnessing the insight of youth participants by stating:

When young people participate in planning and implementing their after-school program, the program becomes more aligned with their interests. Attendance and interest increase, especially among older youth, and the new ideas brought by the young people can result in new and exciting activities. As young people become more involved in articulating what is important to them, program goals and objectives can become more youth-centered (p. 88).

Therefore, through the involvement of youths in the process, community centers and after-school programs will be able to better develop activities that actively engage the local youths in a positive way and help promote positive youth development.

In addition to the design of better activities, the programs will begin to recruit and serve a more diverse and larger crowd, thus expanding their positive influence and development of the youths. Researchers have indicated that programs and organizations that actively involve youth in development are able to “attract diverse youth who achieve greater developmental outcomes than those programs that employ traditional youth development strategies” (Murdock, Paterson, Faye, Lee, and Gatmaitan, 2011, p. 19). In an ever-changing world, it is necessary for after-school programs to consistently involve youths in the development and evaluation of programs to remain up-to-date and relevant within the world of children and young adults.

### **2.3.6 Visual Voices**

This research project was strongly influenced and inspired by Visual Voices, an arts-based data collection method. Visual Voices was developed by Dr. Michael Yonas, now at The University of Pittsburgh, as a tool that harnesses the power and creativity of arts to address the main focus of a larger topic (Yonas et al., 2009). Visual Voices is also directly related to community-based participatory research in that there is a focus on providing the community with needed information through a method designed and agreed upon by the researchers and partners,

it can be used to further build a relationship and partnership with the young individuals involved, and it equally and actively involves all partners in the process (Yonas et al., 2009).

This specific method of community-based participatory research was chosen for this study because it allowed the youth of The Shadyside Boys and Girls Club to actively express their thoughts on a given topic through writing, drawing, painting, or photographic samples: Through the use of this application, the participants are able to express their emotions and thoughts in a controlled, relaxed environment through a fun and engaging activity (Yonas et al., 2009).

Although Visual Voices is a very flexible and adaptive method of research, there are several key components during each session that are necessary to the process. These include a discussion about the prompt, time given to the participants to create their representation of the issues at hand, and a group acknowledgement and discussion of the creative pieces. The facilitated discussions after each session allow for an exploration of the topic and how the youth participants feel about each topic and encourages more conversation about the topic (Yonas et al., 2009). Throughout the process, the youth participants assume more and more responsibility and independence so far as though they may lead the discussion (Yonas et al., 2009).

Finally, one necessary step to Visual Voices is the final compilation of the creative pieces (paintings, drawings, photographs, and written descriptions) into an exhibit to be displayed. This exhibit serves as a source of dissemination of information and recognition of what the participants have created and another part of the process that uses active collaboration between the researchers and youth participants. Creating the final display piece first begins with the participants deciding what pieces to include and in what order. The pieces selected are then cut into 8-inch vertical strips and are alternated to form one “visual voice” of the group. Next, the

writings and drawings are transferred to the collage to create a comprehensive image of the group's work (Yonas et al., 2009).

By involving the youth in a fun, inviting method, researchers are able to understand and acknowledge sub-issues surrounding the larger issue (Yonas et al., 2009). As noted earlier, children and young adults are the experts in after-school programming and knowing what works best for them. Visual Voices is one such way in which researchers are able to gather this information and allow the participants to fully describe and discuss the issues at the forefront of their mind (Yonas et al., 2009).

In addition to the research and information gathered through this process, there are several underlying lessons throughout the Visual Voices process. For instance, there are only a certain number of paints cups and brushes set out so that the youth participants are encourage to share and work together, after each painting session there is a discussion of each participant's creative piece that helps to build a community within the research group, and the youth participants are shown that their opinions are important (Yonas et al., 2009).

The specifics about how Visual Voices inspired this study can be found in the Methods section.

## **2.4 THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB**

### **2.4.1 The Boys and Girls Clubs of America**

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to promoting success and forming positive leaders for tomorrow. The mission of the Boys and Girls

Clubs of America is “to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens” (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Our Mission). Currently, The Boys and Girls Club serves almost 4,000,000 young individuals in over 4,000 local clubs and programs across the United States and on United States military installations throughout the world (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Facts and Figures).

Boys and Girls Clubs, located throughout the United States in diverse neighborhood and communities, are community-based organizations providing a safe and affordable environment for youths after-school and during the summer (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Facts and Figures). Furthermore, Boys and Girls Clubs serve as secondary and supportive locations for children to learn new skills, build positive relationships with youths and adults alike, and a location committed to learning, positive values, healthy lifestyles, and high expectations.

Noted by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America were rated as the number one youth organization for the 18<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 2011 (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Facts and Figures). Therefore, it is evident that places like the Boys and Girls Clubs throughout the United States are dedicated to the positive formation of the youth and leaders of tomorrow and are locations to implement community based participatory research methods in an effort to utilize all individual skills while benefiting the greater community.

#### **2.4.2 The Shadyside Boys and Girls Club**

The Shadyside Boys and Girls Club is a member of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania and is located in the heart of the Shadyside neighborhood in Pittsburgh, PA serving approximately 550 individuals of which about 60% are African America, 25% are white 10% are “other” and 5% are Asian, according to Dave DiGirolamo, Director of the Shadyside Boys and

Girls Club. Due to the location of this particular club, a very diverse group of youths utilizes its services. For instance, young people from surrounding neighborhoods with widely diverse socio-economic characteristics, such as Bloomfield, Friendship, East Liberty, Larimer, and Homewood all converge at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. Most of the members attend a nearby primary school, Liberty Elementary, fall within the age range of 6 and twelve years of age and the majority of the participants are African-America.

During the academic school year, the facilities are open for business directly after the school day ends and closes at approximately 8:00PM, or until the last child leaves. Furthermore, on days when the city of Pittsburgh does not have school, the facilities open at 8:00AM, unless there is inclement weather. Currently, the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club offers a wide range of activities, most of which are free of charge to those with monthly memberships, which is \$30.00 a month with discounted prices available for larger families. These programs include: additional educational support, arts and crafts with occasional special classes, a computer room to teach technical skills, and recreational opportunities such as a gym and videogame room. The Shadyside Boys and Girls Club also offers several sports leagues (basketball, baseball, wrestling, etc.) at an additional price

Additionally, management at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club is actively seeking new programs and techniques in developing dynamic programs that will help to foster positive behaviors and cultivate positive leaders amongst the local youth. With such a widespread reach throughout the city of Pittsburgh and wanting to do more, this club in particular provided an excellent location for pilot testing of using Visual Voices as an evaluative tool and thesis research.



### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the process of planning, implementing, and performing the research throughout the study. This study was approved by the University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board (PRO12080471).

#### **3.1 AN ARTS-BASED APPROACH**

Community-based participatory research methods rely on a partnership approach to research, a partnership that equitably involves all parties. Through this project, community members, representatives of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, and researchers all shared their respective expertise in an attempt to better understand the programming at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club.

This research project employs a very hands-on approach to information gathering and is a participant-focused method of gaining information, which was inspired by Visual Voices. Visual Voices provides a fun, alternative method of gaining information through paintings, drawings, and writings (Yonas et al., 2009). Though different than traditional research methods, community-based methods follow guidelines and general approaches to gather data; this study's methods were deeply inspired and built upon Visual Voices.

Visual Voices is an innovative methodology that directly works with youth participants while incorporating principles of community-based participatory research through engagement in painting, writing, and drawing activities (Yonas et al., 2009). As seen in the background of this paper, there are some very integral pieces of Visual Voices and this thesis draws upon several of these elements including: drawing/painting/writing to represent the participant's view point, working with partners to develop session prompts, and becoming a facilitator for discussion between the participants and Shadyside Boys and Girls Club staff.

Through the partnership between The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, the information gathered through this research can be used to determine how the facilities and programs can be better utilized, according to their members, and assist the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club in working towards their mission statement and institutionalization of their *Formula for Impact*.

### **3.2 RECRUITMENT**

Recruitment of participants began through initial contact with parents facilitated by Dave DiGirolamo, Director of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, and fellow staff members. All youths between the ages of six and 11 were invited to participate in this thesis research via posted information. Due to the timeframe and cost, it was not possible to send details home to each member of the program. In addition to direct recruitment, a descriptive flyer was posted at the front desk of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club to provide information and contact details regarding the purpose of the study. For this research, recruitment focused on youths between the ages of six and eleven to represent the age range of the majority of members at the Shadyside

Boys and Girls Club, as identified by program staff and leadership. An information session about the project, previous examples, goals and objectives, risks and benefits, was offered during a review of the Consent Form (approved by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board), which was read with parents during the information session and/or consent process. Both consent and assent were obtained from parents and participants, respectively. Eligible individuals were those who regularly attended the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club (average minimum of two days a week) between the ages of six and 11. Interested youths were given a Participant Assent form and parents were provided with a Parental Consent form given to parents interested in the project. After parental consent was received, Jeff Howell and Lane Hume introduced the participants to the study at the first group session.

### **3.3 PARTICIPATION**

After receiving parental consent, seven participants volunteered to participate in four 90-120minute sessions that included a facilitated discussion after each exercise, which were all audio recorded. The author and fellow MPH candidate and PI, Lane Hume, led all activities. It was very important that each participant attend each of the sessions; however, it could not be guaranteed that each participant would be there each week due to the attendance of an after-school program.

The age range of participants for this study was six to 11 years old. Of the seven participants, two were brothers, three were females and four were males, six were African American and one was Caucasian, a majority (five) attended Liberty Elementary School, and all regularly attended the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. All group sessions were held weekly on

Tuesdays at 4:00PM in a conference room at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club to ensure that all participants could attend the sessions and that there was a quiet and productive work/project environment. This location was chosen based on meetings with Dave DiGirolamo and Boys and Girls Club staff. A space-use agreement was developed and agreed upon by both the researches and the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. Representatives of the Boys and Girls Club were present for a portion of all sessions; however parents were not included.

Through discussions with Visual Voices developer and thesis committee member, Dr. Michael Yonas, and Mr. DiGirolamo, a schedule of sessions was developed (See Table 1):

**Table 1. Session Prompts**

Session	Prompt(s)
1	1. Free Painting
	2. What you want to be when you grow up or favorite subject in school
2	1. Favorite healthy food
	2. Favorite physical activity at the Boys and Girls Club
3	1. How to make your community better
	2. A role model
4	1. A repainting of the Boys and Girls Club

### **3.3.1 Rationale**

The following section discusses why each topic of the session was chosen and the important information that can be shared with Shadyside Boys and Girls Club administration in order to help provide a more positive and transformational experience for their participants.

### Session 1:

During the first session, there was significant discussion about what the project was about and what the participants would be doing to assist in the research project. Additionally, as a way to help the kids feel more comfortable and have them engaged from the beginning, the participants were able to paint anything they chose.

For the second painting of the day, the participants were asked to paint what they wanted to be when they grew up or their favorite subject in school. This specific topic was asked as a way to help engage the kids in an informal discussion about where their academic and professional interests lay. Through the collection of this information, the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club will be able to invite appropriate guests to speak with the kids and customize programs and projects to their interests.

### Session 2:

A main staple of the Formula for Impact, a publication by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, is Healthy Lifestyle and within this domain lie nutrition and healthy food choices. Therefore, the first round of discussion and creative arts for Session 2 focused on participants' favorite healthy food. Gathering such information can help inform the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club about possible healthy alternative foods they could provide for the kids during their "snack time."

Remaining focused on the idea of Healthy Lifestyles for the day, the second part of the session was to help identify favorite physical activities at the Boys and Girls Club. Physical Activity is a main component of the Healthy Lifestyle goals set out by the national Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Based on the information gathered through this discussion, programs

and activities can be altered, improved, or removed in order to actively engage more participants on a regular basis.

#### Session 3:

To begin Session 3, the participants were asked to share ideas about how they could make their community a better place, whether that would mean safer, cleaner, or happier. Similar to Healthy Lifestyles, Good Character and Citizenship are other main staples of the Formula for Impact. Through discussing with the participants possible ways for them to help make their community a better place to live, the Boys and Girls Club will be able to define possible community service opportunities or partnerships with local organizations in order to help foster a culture of positive characters and active citizenship.

In addition to becoming knowledgeable about what kids can do in their community, it is important to determine who their role models are and why the participants admire these individuals. This information can help to determine what is admirable and desirable for youths, which can in turn help to bring in guests and local community members as a supportive role model teaching the major components of the Formula for Impact.

#### Session 4:

Session 4 was the final creative session for the participants of this research project. For the final painting, the participants were asked to paint the Boys and Girls Club with changes that they would like to see. In providing this information to the administration, possible changes or alterations can be made to the physical space, social culture, and programming of the Boys and Girls Club based on the interests of the kids.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION**

Throughout this study, multiple types of data were collected. These types included audio recordings, detailed notes of discussions with participants, written descriptions of what each participant created, and the actual creative pieces.

Audio recordings were collected for each group discussion through a Sony digital voice recorder or AudioMemos application for the iPhone. All audio recordings were then uploaded to a desktop computer and transcribed via ExpressScribe and its accompanying foot pedal. The length of audio recordings varied throughout the course of this research project depending on the number of individuals present at each respective session. These audio recordings included discussions during the painting/drawing process and of the participants' description of what they had created.

The author personally transcribed all audio from all sessions, and all identifiable information was removed from the transcription. Key Themes were identified and complemented the paintings and drawings the participants created.

During two of the sessions, another Masters of Public Health candidate assisted the author with the activities. On these dates, one-on-one discussions were held with each of the participants about what they painted and why they painted it. This activity helped to include and encourage the "quieter" individuals to share their insights. During these discussions, detailed notes were taken to accompany the creative pieces, very similar to discussion transcriptions.

A major component of Visual Voices is to have the participants reflect on what they created and write down their feelings, thoughts, and insights. All written descriptions and thoughts were written down by the participants on an additional piece of paper and shared with the author. These descriptions were collected as they were completed and placed with their

accompanying creative works. Data collected through this means were used to help describe creative works in the same way as group discussion transcriptions and coding.

The final data collected through this process were the actual creative works the participants created. The number of paintings varied by participant as some wanted to create more and some wanted to create fewer. These creative pieces were used as the basis for depicting the participants' thoughts and feelings toward each prompt as well as fuel the discussion between the researcher and the participants and the participants as a group.

### **3.5 ANALYSIS**

All transcribed audio were coded by hand to focus on three key components of the Boys and Girls Clubs Formula for Impact: Academic Success, Healthy Lifestyles, and Good Character and Citizenship. Additionally, these major themes were agreed upon and pre-designated during conversations with Dave DiGirolamo.

When coding the transcriptions, each singular descriptive phrase was removed from the general document and divided into sections depending on the relevance to the key components of the Boys and Girls Club. At first, there were only the previously stated three topics; however, after all sessions had been completed and the audio recordings had been transcribed, there appeared to be a new, very relevant topic to account for: possible programs. A complete guide to the codes used for this analysis can be found in the following section.



### 3.5.1 Coding Reference

**Table 2. Coding Table**

<b>General Code</b>	<b>Sub-code</b>	<b>Specific Code</b>
Academics	Career Aspirations	- Health care and working in a hospital, a doctor/ veterinarian, Entertainer
	Favorite Subject	- Mathematics, All of school
Healthy Lifestyles	Physical Activity	- Play at recess, gym activities, going to the playground
	Healthy Foods	- Fruits, vegetables, juice
Good Character and Citizenship	What is wrong	- Littering, not enough color, needs more local vegetation, need more healthy foods, more playgrounds needed, people getting picked on, violence
	What they can do	- Pick up trash and get trash cans and recycling bins, plant fruit trees and more vegetation in general, tell an adult or stand up for yourself
	Role Models	- Entertaining people, gains attention, helping others feel better
Potential Programs	Career Development	- A group choir at the Boys and Girls Club, role models coming to speak
	Healthy Lifestyles	- A community garden, healthy foods at snack time and in the snack store, sports and athletic activity tournaments
	Good Character and Citizenship	- Community service gatherings (picking up trash)

## **4.0 RESULTS**

The following section discusses main themes from discussions and provides photographs of all artistic representations created during this process as well as the coding dictionary used to organize and analyze the transcribed discussions.

### **4.1 KEY THEMES**

#### **4.1.1 Academic Success**

A primary goal of the Boys and Girls Clubs across the country is to provide additional academic support and to help assist participants remain on track to progress from each grade level. Based on the importance placed on academic progress, one session was dedicated to focusing on the participants' favorite subject or what they would like to be when they grow up. From these prompts several sub-themes emerged.

Career aspirations and favorite classes are the two major themes from this session. Several of the participants noted what they would like to be when they grow up. Careers ranged from health-related fields (three participants) to athletic competitors (three participants) to entertainers (two participants). The following figures represent the results from this specific session. Those who described their future in a health-related field referenced their ability to help

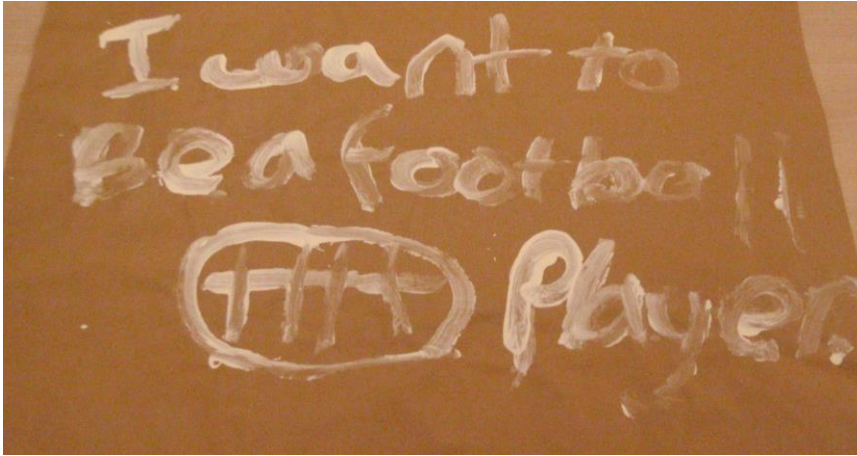
others and make them feel better as driving factors for their career choice. One female participant recalled a specific interaction she had with a doctor recently as a reason for her wanting to become a medical professional,



**Figure 1. "I want to be a doctor"**

*I want to be a doctor because Dr. Alex helped me when I had the flu and he gave me different kinds of medicine and stuff and a shot and I want to help people get better and stuff and that's why I want to be a doctor.*

Individuals who shared their desire to become athletic professionals, referenced the ability to entertain a large group of people at one time, the fame, the money associated with the career choice, and the enjoyment they receive when they compete in a specific athletic event.



**Figure 2. "I want to be a football player"**

Two members of the group explained that they wanted to become musical artists

*"Because I like music and entertaining people to make sure they all have fun."*



**Figure 3. One female participant noted her enjoyment of singing**

In addition to career aspirations, two students discussed their favorite subject in school.

One participant, who also stated she wanted to be a doctor when she is older, noted that mathematics was her favorite subject because she enjoyed the teacher and what they were

learning in school. The figure below is her representation of her math class and what they had learned that day.



**Figure 4. "I like my math class the most"**

Another participant really enjoyed the entirety of school, but especially when there is something that is exciting and engaging for her. She really did not like school when it was “boring.” This is the same participant who noted that she would like to be a veterinarian later in life.

One major theme which arose very organically and unplanned was the discussion of the Homework Room and the programs that accompanied it. A single participant in particular, a male, discussed how the homework program that the Boys and Girls Club provided last year, one that rewarded kids who regularly completed their homework with pizza once a month, was a great one and more kids would participate and complete their homework that way and added

*Well, I think that people should just enjoy doing their homework and get it done so they can play the rest of the time and that if you do your homework regularly, you should be rewarded.*

However, when asked if everyone should be forced to complete their homework, he responded with:

*We don't like when people force us to do things. Like Ms. J, she always forces people to do their homework and nobody is happy.*

This participant went on further to discuss how he believed kids should be rewarded for completing their homework, not forced.

As seen through his discussion and his creative pieces, this young male wants to see a similar program encouraging members to complete their homework to come back, which was the major contribution he made to the Boys and Girls Club during the final session.

#### **4.1.2 Healthy Lifestyles**

Physical Fitness, Healthy Foods, and Role Models were all major sub-themes found within the discussion of Healthy Lifestyles throughout this research. In addition to Academic Success, the Boys and Girls Club strives to promote Healthy Lifestyles amongst its youth participants.

In order to gain a better understanding of what physically-active programs the youth participants enjoy and participate in the most, the participants were prompted to describe their favorite physical activity at the Boys and Girls Club. Many of the participants (five) noted that they enjoyed activities in the gym. These activities included basketball, dodgeball, and sharks and minnows, as depicted in the paintings below. The participants who drew these noted the enjoyment they received from running around in the gym and the competitive nature of all the activities:



**Figure 5. "My favorite thing is dodgeball"**

*I like shooting hoops. I learn about basketball at the Boys and Girls Club and I keep getting better.*

*I really like ping-pong, you have to keep your eye on the ball and pay attention to what you are doing. You move a lot if you really play. We do these kind of activities a lot!*

Additionally, two participants noted their enjoyment of other active engagements: ping-pong and going to the local playground at the local school (Liberty Elementary). The female participant who mentioned her enjoyment of ping-pong noted the active engagement and playfulness of the game.

Physical activity is not the only aspect of Healthy Lifestyles that the Boys and Girls Clubs of America focus on: they also place a strong emphasis on including education on healthy foods and providing healthy snacks for their members. In an effort to discover which healthy foods are most preferred amongst most participants, they were asked to describe their favorite healthy foods and ones that they would enjoy to have for snack after-school. All participants recognized their education in school on the benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables to promote a healthy body.

When asked about their favorite healthy foods, the participants listed, painted, and discussed many different fruits and vegetables from apples, grapes, and coconuts to squash and pumpkins. The combination of paintings below represents the participants' favorite healthy



foods. The participants' enjoyment of healthy fruits and vegetables was reinforced through one-on-one interviews where the participants shared the following information.



**Figure 6. A compilation of the participants' healthy foods**

*I like them because they taste really good, but I don't get them often so they are special.*

*They are yummy. They are really good and I like them with yogurt and they are natural.*

*I like them very much and they are good for you. They help you grow and stay healthy.*

Furthermore, when asked if they would like to have these healthier foods as their snack upon entering the Boys and Girls Club, all answered with a coordinated and emphatic “YES!”

One major discussion that was held with a single participant who wanted to stay longer was about the danger of smoking and that this was a major component of becoming a healthier individual. This young male summarized his thoughts by,

*I want the teenage kids to stop smoking too. There are a lot of people that do that. My next door neighbor does it. Our gym class teacher told us to never breathe in the smoky air and I never did. I hold my breath. The stuff/steam gets into your lungs and makes it pink to black and then if you keep on smoking it gets worse.*



### **4.1.3 Good Character and Citizenship**

In addition to providing additional support to help encourage Healthy Lifestyles and Academic Success, the Boys and Girls Club looks to support its members in becoming positive and contributing members of society, which has strong ties between Academic Success and Healthy Lifestyles. This discussion addressed how the participants could be better members of society; these discussions spoke to what they could do to make a positive impact on their community.

When asked to describe and discuss what is they do not like in their community and how they could help change these issues, many of the participants noted that their community is dirtied with trash on the sidewalks and streets and that it makes their neighborhood look disrespected. Also, one participant noted the environmental concerns that are associated with littering and that this was a major reason for her to discuss trash in her neighborhood. In addition to the previous reasons of why littering is bad, one male participant also discussed the possibility of people tripping and injuring themselves because of the trash on the ground, and this is why it was important to him for the sidewalks and streets to be cleaned.

Upon asking them what they could do in response to this specific issue, many of them discussed the possibility of putting more trashcans and recycling bins around the area so that it would be more convenient for everyone to do the right thing – throw their trash away. The painting below is the participant's representations of a potential program they could institute in their neighborhood.



**Figure 7. "Picking up trash in my neighborhood"**

This finding can be summarized by one quote of a female participant,

*What I drew is me picking up garbage and putting it in a garbage can and the reason we should recycle is because when the street is too dirty, the garbage goes into the drain and people have to drink that water at some point. It will be all dirty and stuff.*

The youngest participant in this project discussed how he would like to see two major changes in his neighborhood that he was already extremely happy with: more local vegetation and more colorful buildings. This male participant connected the previously discussed Healthy Lifestyles topic of healthy foods and physical activity with how he could directly make his neighborhood a better place. He discussed having more fruit trees and gardens in his neighborhood so that healthy alternatives are much closer and more individuals will choose to eat these healthy foods. Additionally, he spoke of how he enjoyed bright colors and they seemed to help put everyone in a happier mood; because of this, his next change to his neighborhood were bright homes to help lighten the mood surrounding him and his neighbors. He also stated that he wished there was a playground in his neighborhood that was safe and new so that all of

the children could come together in one place to play and exercise. This participant's painting is shown below.



**Figure 8. His new neighborhood**

One participant stayed longer than all of the other youths and wanted to paint more about his neighborhood and the challenges of living within it. His painting showed one individual who had just shot one person and was aiming the gun at another. He referenced the gunshots he would hear throughout the night when he was trying to sleep. His viewpoint on the situation was described as follows.



**Figure 9. A shooting in Sheraden**

*I mean, the people that are crazy have the guns, that's what my mom says. That dude that would do something with a gun is ignorant and sometimes they fool people. They just shoot it up in the air. I live in Sheraden and sometimes I have a nightmare or something like that because I sleep close to the windows and I peek out the window and I can see things. Some days, I'm in the middle of sleep and people just shoot and I can hear the bullets.*

The same participant also had this to say about his community:

*I don't like it [Sheraden]. It gets on my nerves. All these people are cussin' all the time and saying the "N" word and talking all loud. People just be too loud, there's crashes, and you can hear all of these noises.*

This participant then began to share how he thought kids could become involved and believed that the world was in need of another leader, like Martin Luther King Jr. (this session was around Martin Luther King Day and the participants were learning about this in school). Specifically in response to what he believes the next concern is for the United States,

*They need to hide them guns somewhere, I know that! Because people will get guns, but not for wars, that's the only time they should be allowed. I don't know why they put them out on the streets. That's just messed up. Kids could talk to other people about it, though.*

An unexpected sub-theme that emerged throughout the entire program was the presence of violence among the participants and could be summarized by the following quote:

*"Oh that [talking about the problem] would never work. Just stand up for yourself and punch him in the face. Because if they punch you, you punch them back or they won't stop. Yeah, nobody lays their hands on you. Someone pushes you and you're supposed to defend yourself because if not then that's how they know they can always bully you."*

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

As the United States' society, economy, and educational sector changes, after-school programs will become increasingly more important for the positive development of youths, the future of the United States. This study focused on gaining the insight of regular members at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, on three main components of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America's *Formula for Impact*: academic success, physical fitness, and good character and citizenship. This chapter: 1) discusses the results of this study in relation to evaluating and providing possible changes to current programs at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club; 2) discusses how Visual Voices and other community-based participatory research techniques can be used in the future to better tailor programs and activities for the participants; 3) brings to light further questions raised throughout this study; 4) highlights the strengths and limitations of the study; and 5) outlines how the results from this study will be used to help the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club and how results will be disseminated.

## **5.1 EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMING**

### **5.1.1 Academic Success**

According to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America's publication, *Formula for Impact*, academic success is a priority outcome because "young people who drop out of high school are significantly less likely to secure a good job, earn an adequate salary and have a promising future" (Formula For Impact, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, nationally, all clubs are geared towards providing an experience that appeals to youths, supports their academic success, engages youths in alternative learning activities, and provides additional help to members who are having difficulty grasping academic knowledge (Formula For Impact, 2011).

For the age group participating in this study (individuals aged six-11), the *Formula for Impact* states specific milestones for elementary school students. These goals include: 1) on-time grade progression; 2) school attendance; 3) reading and math proficiency; and 4) prevention of summer learning loss (Formula For Impact, 2011). This study did not focus on school attendance or prevention of summer learning loss, but rather on the active programming and support systems in place to help members achieve their academic benchmarks. Through discussion and creative pieces, many of the participants in this study suggested that a better reward system be put into place. One idea was to not allow individuals into the gymnasium, game room, or computer room until all of their required homework had been completed.

Another suggestion for the administration was to provide a reward system similar to ones in years past. This system would include a progress sheet that tracks the number of times individuals completed their assignments, and at the end of every month there would be a celebration to reward individuals who consistently met their academic benchmarks at the

Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. There was some lengthy discussion about which system would perform better and encourage individuals to do their homework.

One individual very adamantly stated that his peers would highly discourage the possibility of “forcing” individuals to complete their assignment. They cited that requiring such a task would remove the incentive and willingness to complete the assignments because whenever they are told they “**must**” complete a certain task, there is greater resistance. In response, this participant believed that when there is active engagement from staff members in rewarding individuals who **want** to do their homework, it would create a culture within the program for most members to do their homework in order to receive the reward. After a lengthy discussion of what the best possible outcome would be, both individuals agreed that it would be best to start with a reward system; however, if this system did not produce the desired results, the staff might enforce a mandatory homework program before individuals could enjoy recreational rooms.

As a recommendation to the staff and administration of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, a very similar system would appear appropriate for implementation due to the attractiveness to members and the increased participation. It is integral in any program planning to coordinate with the affected population in an effort to create a more comprehensive and well respected and accepted alteration to programs. The youth participants and members of this after-school program are well-aware of the need to complete and maintain academic achievement; by incorporating such a program, it will allow youths the power to choose to complete their homework while supporting positive achievement through a rewards system. The implementation of a system similar to this would also allow for the members to create autonomy and self-discipline by empowering them with the choice and responsibility of when to complete their homework.

Another topic that was discussed in relation to academic success at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club was career aspirations and/or the participants' favorite subject in school. The reflections for this specific topic varied greatly. Several male participants want to be football players when they are older. The reasons for this specific career varied as well. Some of the participants were active members of their local football program and it was something they truly enjoyed. Other reasons for choosing a football player as a career included the money, fame, and attention given to them in society, especially in Pittsburgh.

Two participants noted that they would like to be in the music industry when they are older. One female participant would like to be a singer while a male participant wants to become a rapper. Although different genders, both noted the popularity of these careers and the ability to entertain many people at any given time. Furthermore, the female added she would like to be a singer because it is something that she enjoys doing and something that relaxes her.

This female participant also noted that a lot of her friends enjoy singing as well and proposed the idea of beginning a choir or singing group at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. Through providing this opportunity, participants could meet others who share similar interests in singing. Additionally, this program will help to provide an alternative activity from the games and computers rooms.

Beyond the entertainment and sports industries, one female participant painted a doctor as what she would like to be when she is older. Through her written description of why she wanted to be a nurse or doctor, the female participant noted that she had a positive experience at the hospital recently when a doctor was very nice to her and helped her feel better very quickly. Additionally, this participant noted that she really enjoys helping others and would like to bring the same happiness to others.



The same female participant also wanted to paint about her favorite subject in school that was mathematics. In particular, she noted that she really enjoyed her teacher for this class and that she made the class interesting and fun.

Providing a strong support system for members to complete their assignments is extremely important; however, it is also imperative that after-school programs provide non-traditional means of encouraging their academic success and developing their interests. In addition to the proposed alterations of the current academic program, it would be extremely beneficial for the Boys and Girls Club to actively encourage and recruit members of the local community to volunteer their time at the after-school program. Through having these individuals visit the facilities and spend time with the members, they can instill positive attributes in the youths, which can include the importance of academic success.

### **5.1.2 Healthy Lifestyles**

This study focused on the application of and education on basic nutrition and healthy eating as well as ways for individuals to remain physically active.

During one Visual Voices session, the research group focused on favorite healthy foods. Many of the participants painted about various fruits that they enjoyed eating. A couple of the participants, during a discussion before painting, mentioned that they would like to draw foods that are not considered a “healthy” food (for example: apple pie). Although there were a few suggestions of foods that are not considered a healthy food, all participants had a general understanding of fruits and vegetables and what was healthy for them to eat. Based on the results from this study, it appears that the basics of healthy nutrition to build a healthy lifestyle are understood by the members at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. Due to these findings,

there is no need for an immediate introduction of healthy eating lessons. However, although many of the members understand what is a healthy food, the facilities at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club could provide better nutritional options at their “snack store” and during snack time.

The participants of this study voiced their thoughts that they would really enjoy it if snack time included more of the fruits that they enjoyed eating such as kiwi, peaches, oranges, and tangerines. Currently the program offers processed, high-sugar and fat snacks. Based on the recommendations of the youth participants, it would be beneficial and agreeable with their *Formula for Impact* for the Boys and Girls Club to exchange these unhealthy snacks for fresher, healthier snacks. For many of the individuals utilizing their services, the food provided by this program is the only nutrition they will have until parents come to pick up their children, some as late as seven or eight at night. Therefore, it is even more important for this food to be a healthy source of vitamins and nutritional content.

The current lack of proper nutrition appears to be a negative attribute of the after-school program; however, this provides excellent opportunities for new partnerships to be formed. Without viewing the budget or knowing the culture of city-served snacks (all snacks provided free-of-charge to the participants are given to the facilities through the City of Pittsburgh), it is recommended that local grocers and farms be approached about providing the youths of these programs with healthy, nutritional foods. In addition to benefiting the youths, this provides a possible outlet for local businesses to contribute to the community and build a better reputation within the community.

In addition to altering the current healthy snack availability, several of the participants voiced their interest and enjoyment in taking care of a garden at their house. This could provide a great new project for the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club: A community garden. By providing

such an opportunity, participants will be able to learn the general concepts of gardening as well as the potential to have healthy foods being grown directly at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club.

Healthy food choices are not the only component to a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle includes physical activity and remaining at a healthy weight. The elementary level milestones for healthy lifestyles include regular physical activity (Formula For Impact, 2011). With an importance placed on regular physical activity, one of the Visual Voices activities sought to gain information into the most popular physically active programs and activities within the Boys and Girls Club. By focusing on what the children already enjoy and building on these activities, it is more likely that the majority of participants would continue to participate.

These physical activities varied throughout the study and included dodgeball, basketball, and ping-pong. Throughout a discussion focused on how more individuals could be included in these activities, a main theme emerged of promoting physical activity through a tournament for each activity with a prize for the winners. As a recommendation for how to engage more individuals on a regular basis, having a bi-weekly or monthly tournament in a different sport or activity each month (one for males and one for females) could provide an outlet for physical activity while serving as a platform to introduce new sports and activities.

One female participant discussed how boys tended to overrun the gymnasium and that girls do not always feel comfortable being in there. She provided a suggestion for change within the Boys and Girls Club to help prevent this from happening; she created the idea of creating a “girls only” time in the gym for an hour or so a day and after the girls are finished in the gym, the boys could have their time.

### 5.1.3 Good Character and Citizenship

Healthy lifestyles and academic success are both important aspects of a successful after-school program that prepares youths to develop into positive members of society and realize their full potential; however, providing a platform for members to learn how to become a positive citizen is another integral component. According to the *Formula for Impact*, good character and citizenship are “integral to a young person’s ability to become a productive, caring and responsible citizen” (Formula For Impact, 2011, p. 9).

This study focused on attributes of the program that support the development of good character and citizenship, which includes engaging members in community-based service and introducing concepts of good character while recognizing good behavior (Formula For Impact, 2011).

During the third Visual Voices session, the participants discussed how they could make their community a better place. Many of the individuals noted that they could help by picking up trash in their neighborhood and providing the community with recycling and trash receptacles so they can help keep their neighborhood clean. The reasons for helping keep their neighborhood varied greatly. One male participant described littering as an issue because individuals could trip and hurt themselves.

A female participant described the importance of keeping her neighborhood clean because of the consequences for not being kind to the environment.

A male participant noted that he would like to see the neighborhood have more colorful buildings with a better playground and more fruit trees so the community could have healthy snacks nearby.

Therefore, by building on the interest and understanding that this is a basic way for kids to get involved, it would benefit the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, the Shadyside community, and the participants to organize a trash pick-up day within the community as a group community service program. By providing this opportunity, it is showing young members that they are able to help in the community and helps to instill a sense of pride and commitment to their community.

During the final session, one participant began to discuss his neighborhood and what he is surrounded with on a daily basis. In the depiction of his neighborhood, he shared how he is surrounded by loud noises at night and gunshots of random individuals. When asked how he thought he could change it, he came up with the idea of kids becoming involved in the effort to remove guns from the streets because all they do is cause trouble. More specifically, he noted that this generation needs a new leader, like Martin Luther King Jr., that would be a voice against this specific problem.

Based on information gathered from this participant alone, the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club could provide more educational activities on social justice leaders from the past, specifically of the African-American Human Rights campaigns due to the high attendance of minorities at this specific location. Through providing such opportunities, youth members will gain insight and understanding into the history of social justice and help to inspire them to become active citizens and individuals of good character. Additionally, there appears to be a strong need for a program working on coping with the effects of living in such environments and dealing with the surrounding violence and danger. This program could also focus on the ability to positively deal with conflicting situations so that the youths, the future of tomorrow, will

better understand how to constructively settle arguments and not use force and violence to settle disputes later in life, when the severity could be much greater.

## **5.2 COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION**

This study serves as a pilot project on how community-based participatory research techniques like Visual Voices can help to provide informative insight on program evaluation. It is a general understanding throughout public health classes and research studies that it is imperative to work with the community in a collaborative effort in order to create the most efficient and beneficial program. What is truly ironic about this understanding is that it rarely is applied to youth participants in the social services field. From past experiences, there is a very paternalistic “adults know best” application to programs and their implementation for youths. However, as shown throughout this study, actively engaging and respecting the insight of youths can provide great ideas and suggestions for how to alter current programs to be more engaging for youths, while maintaining their underlying purpose (academic success, healthy lifestyles, good character, etc).

## **5.3 PUBLIC HEALTH RELEVANCE**

Public health is influenced and defined by a number of factors that affect everyday life including education, healthy eating, and safety, all of which are directly linked to the Boys and

Girls Club. As more kids are left alone after school hours are over, there is a greater need for positive after-school programs to provide necessary these services to the community, especially in low-income urban populations that promote academic achievement, healthy lifestyles, and good citizenship (Boys and Girls Club, *Our Mission*). This study specifically focuses on how after-school programs are able to use evaluation techniques to better understand their members and how they can provide the most productive and encouraging activities. Therefore, the direct linkage between public health and this study is the effort to provide the best possible after-school program for youth participants.

#### **5.4 FURTHER QUESTIONS RAISED BY THIS STUDY**

Through this pilot study and qualitative research of engaging youth participants in program evaluation, many other questions have been raised, both about the application of this technique and the further engagement of youths in general. Questions for future researchers, include:

- 1.) How can this technique be used across age groups?
- 2.) How diverse are the educational, social, and economical backgrounds of individuals these programs are serving?
- 3.) How regular is attendance of the members at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club?
- 4.) How can Boys and Girls Club administration take part in the process?
- 5.) Is there a better process to discuss potential changes at the Boys and Girls Club?
- 6.) What are possible funding sources to make some of these suggestions and ideas realities?
- 7.) What relationships can be formed with local businesses to help provide healthy practices within the Boys and Girls Club?

## **5.5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

This master's thesis research study has both strengths and limitations. The primary strength of this study is the use of an information-gathering, qualitative research technique to evaluate and suggest changes to current activities at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. A major strength is actively engaging youths in a non-traditional, positive experience with research in which opinions and thoughts are heard and respected. Another strength of this study is the ability to serve as an entrance into social action and research for many of these youths, helping them realize that they have a voice and individuals in power can value what they have to say. In addition to the project-specific strengths, each researcher brings a set of strength with him or her. Personally, throughout this study, the researcher realized one of his strengths was the ability to actively engage youth participants and help them become aware the true importance and pleasure from this research so they became very fond of the project. This is due, in part, to the amount of time the researcher spent at the facilities getting to know the kids and building relationships with them prior to the start of the project.

Although this study has strengths and provides fertile ground for future applications, there are limitations to this study. The most apparent and common limitation is the number of participants, only seven, due to funding, lack of time, and lack of human resources. The inability to generalize the results from this study to the entire Shadyside Boys and Girls Club is a major limitation; however, if such a study can be performed with multiple groups across various backgrounds. Additionally, a limitation of the researcher was the ability and comfort in managing a group much larger than the seven participants in this study, and conducting a qualitative study for the first time. Due to the time limitation of this study, certain questions



removed from the project and many of the topics did not have an adequate amount of time to fully research the question.

Though the logistical strengths and limitations of the study are worth noting, it is also important to understand these same aspects of using the Visual Voices method as a tool for evaluating programs at a community center as this is a novel use. Due to a strong relationship with and clear goals set by the Boys and Girls Club administration, it was easy to design questions to help address their main concerns of Academic Success, Good Citizenship, and Healthy Lifestyles. However, due to the large number of programs at the center and limited time, it was impossible to address each aspect and understand what is and is not working with each respective activity; therefore, understanding of ongoing programs is incomplete.

Having a volunteer who built relationships with each of the kids prior to the research study and who was not considered administration at the center, resulted in a more relaxed and comfortable setting in which the participants were able to share their feelings about the club. Additionally, this allowed for a third party to discuss the findings of the study about the programs with the administration directly and created confidentiality of who said what. Such an environment allowed for a more constructive dialogue about what rational changes could be made to create tangible results.

At the general level, the methods of Visual Voices provides an excellent opportunity for organizations to evaluate their ongoing programs; however, to fully understand what changes can be made to specific programs, a more detailed and direct goal of the study needs to be determined. For instance, if the Boys and Girls Club would like to know what is a barrier to its participants attending “movie night,” questions and sessions could be specifically tailored to that program.

Though this study was largely inspired and guided by Visual Voices, there were several elements that were not present throughout the research. Ideally, there would have been a cooperative decision-making process of which topics to discuss, a group session to develop the themes for analysis, and a lack of group discussions.

## **5.6 LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES**

As with any short-term, irregular activity at an after-school program, Visual Voices faced various logistical obstacles and logistical challenges. Firstly, there was the challenge of obtaining the first participants. Visual Voices and research projects at The Boys and Girls Club are not typical; therefore, they had reservations about participating in the “unknown.” Because of many volunteer hours at the Boys and Girls Club and positive relationships with staff members, the researchers were able to recruit seven participants for the study. Secondly, even after recruiting participants for the study, it was difficult to find a time and day that worked for everyone. Due to this restriction and various other activities at the Boys and Girls Club, there were several times where some individuals were unable to participate in a particular session or the entire session would have to be rescheduled due to only having one or two participants present.

Another challenge was receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearances and abiding by the stringent guidelines established. Initially, it took many hours and multiple application drafts to gain a better understanding of how the IRB works and what the researchers, would need to do in order to have this project approved. Additionally, there is the challenge of providing the participants with needed incentives and compensation.

## 5.7 DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

The reasoning and motivation behind this research study are to provide tangible results and suggestions to Shadyside Boys and Girls Club administration on how they can alter and improve their current programs to better reach their goals described in the *Formula for Impact*. A meeting will be held with Dave DiGirolamo, Director of the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, to discuss the results and suggestions that have emerged from this research study.

As reinforced throughout the entirety of the researchers' education at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health, it is imperative to share the results with the community and organization that is directly affected by the results of the study and to share the results with the participants of the study to ensure a positive and collaborative future relationship between researchers and the community.

As stated earlier, the final exhibit that will be created through cooperation of the participants and researchers will be placed in the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club for the surrounding community to see and for the participants to show their friends and family members their contribution to the project. This exhibit will be completed with the researchers and participants to serve as a focal point for individuals entering the building and will, hopefully, engage other members in the community in the evaluation process of the programming at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club.

Furthermore, the researcher will be working closely with Dave DiGirolamo and Shadyside Boys and Girls Club staff to encourage active discussion between them and the participants of this study to promote change in the programming. If at any point the participants do not wish to voice their opinions in a formal meeting, the researcher will offer to anonymously share the participants' thoughts to the administration. Hopefully, this will encourage dialogue

between the administration and members to help better understand what is valued and what programs need to be changed.

Additionally, this entire thesis will be submitted online to the University of Pittsburgh to be published via their online portal. This will enable future masters and doctoral candidates to view the research and provide them with the ability to build, alter, or supplement already performed research, thus helping to improve overall research in the community.

## **5.8 FUTURE PARTNERSHIPS**

A direct partnership between the researchers and the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club strongly influenced the focus of this thesis; however, it is important to actively seek new partners to focus on the changes in programs at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. For instance, to help improve the quality of snacks available for their members, the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club can work with local grocers and farmers or health organizations to help promote healthy lifestyles and eating during the after-school program. Additionally, the Boys and Girls Club could work with local organizations dedicated toward promoting a better community in the Shadyside area. This relationship could help provide the youth members opportunities to learn the value of assisting others through events such as food or clothing drivers. Furthermore, directly relatable to the results of this study, these relationships could help fuel community-service trips where participants would be able to help pick up trash in the area and beautify the neighborhood.

At this time, it is uncertain to understand or predict relationships that will be formed in an effort to make these changes at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club; however, after meetings with

Boys and Girls Club administration and the participants of this trip, a better understanding can be obtained.

## **5.9 BOYS AND GIRL CLUB PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

One potential result of this study that could have major implications for both the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club and the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh is an ongoing relationship that provides necessary research for the Boys and Girls Club while enriching practicum and research opportunities for future professionals.

Through this study, much has been recognized about what the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club is doing well and where their challenges lay. For instance, it is clear that there is a strong need for providing more and healthier snack options for the members and there are students at the Graduate School of Public Health who have interest in the availability of healthy foods in urban settings. By providing the opportunity to have a master's or doctoral candidate work directly with the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club a better understanding of the barriers to such programs can be recognized and new programs can be created to help make healthier options more available.

Every year students from the school are required to complete a practicum and some choose to perform a research project to complete their studies at the Graduate School of Public Health. The men and women at this school are going to be the future leaders of the public health world and are at the disposal of the Boys and Girls Club as a free "agency". The information gathered through these internships and studies could provide the necessary data to the Boys and

Girls Club that could secure more funding through grants or provide easier modes and methods of communication to help engage the local community in support and share needed information to their members and parents.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The need for affordable, positive after-school programs is growing each year, especially as parents are working longer days for less money. These programs can be integral in the proper development of youths to become contributing members of society and healthy individuals. By integrating youth participants in the evaluation of activities provided by these programs, a better understanding of successes, barriers, and challenges can be gained. Through this research, several program changes and novel ideas have emerged and an example of how research can engage youth participants in a fun and engaging way.powe

## **APPENDIX**

### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS**

The following documents were all submitted to or received from the Institutional Review Board at The University of Pittsburgh for study PRO12080471, which was approved on November 9, 2012.



## A.1 PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR MINORS

**Title of Project:** "Assessing the impact of a community center in an urban setting using Community Based Participatory applications."

**Investigators:** Lane Hume, Jeffrey Howell, and Michael Yonas (Mentor)

### Parental Consent Form

#### **What is this project about?**

Your child is being invited to participate in a research study called "Assessing the Impact of a Community Center in an Urban Setting Using Community Based Participatory Applications ". The purpose of this study is to learn how the Boys and Girls Club can more adequately provide the necessary tools for development and success to those who attend the Boys and Girls Club's programs. Through this project, the Boys and Girls Club and University of Pittsburgh – Graduate School of Public Health are hoping to gather information on how to better serve the community.

#### **Who are the people running this project? How can I get in touch with them?**

The Principal Investigators on this project are Lane Hume and Jeffrey Howell, both graduate students at The University of Pittsburgh. Lane and Jeff will be working directly with Dr. Michael Yonas from the Department of Family Medicine at The University of Pittsburgh.

Michael can be reached at:

412-383-2825

Department of Family Medicine, University of Pittsburgh

3518 Fifth Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15261

Lane can be reached at:

[Leh65@pitt.edu](mailto:Leh65@pitt.edu)

(501) 658-2483

Jeff can be reached at:

[jth45@pitt.edu](mailto:jth45@pitt.edu)

(412) 417-5454

#### **What will my child be asked to do?**

Your child will be asked to participate in several (4-6) group sessions, 2 hours in length, once or twice a week, for 4-6 consecutive weeks at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club, of the arts-based participatory research methods Visual Voices and PhotoVoice. The session dates will be verified at least one week in advance. Visual Voices allows for your child to express their opinions and views of the Boys and Girls Club through drawing, writing, and/or painting. PhotoVoice will enable your child to take photos of the

Page 1 of 5



University Of  
Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review  
Board

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Renewal Date: 11/8/2013

IRB #: PRO12080471

world from how they view it and explain to us what they see. Throughout both of these methods, your child will be asked to show how the Boys and Girls Club:

- Has affected their lives
- Can utilize their facilities to better engage the youth
- Can assist with their academic performance
- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Encourage positive citizenship

During the research activities, with your permission and their knowledge, photographs will be taken of your child and the other children participating in the activities to incorporate into a final exhibit. Copies of all of the photographs will be provided to you and your child. The final exhibit display will be developed and shared at the final session.

After each art session, there will be a discussion/debrief based on what the children created. Each of these discussions will be tape-recorded and a note-taker will be present to record information about the discussion that cannot be recorded through a tape-recorder (interactions, joking, etc). Each discussion will then be transcribed to ensure all discussion points are recorded. Following the transcription of the discussion, all audio recordings will be destroyed. Your child's real names will not be used on the discussion group and you will be encouraged to adopt a "nickname" of their choice for the project so that people will not know that they participated in the project, what they created, unless they tell someone. During the research project activities, we will only call your child by your chosen nickname.

#### **Are there any risks to my child?**

None of the things that we ask or talk about during the research project sessions should make your child feel uneasy or uncomfortable. We will not be asking about anything personal and your child DOES NOT have to discuss anything that might make them feel uncomfortable. Your child's participation is voluntary, which means she/he will make the decisions of what they would like to share. We will ask that the group not share what is discussed during the sessions with others outside of the group. However, if private information comes up during the discussion group, another person in the group could share that with someone else. Your child DOES NOT have to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with. Your child will be asked to use a nickname to keep all of the tape recordings private. Any information that we gather through the project will remain private. If we learn that your child is being abused we must, by law, report this to Child Protective Services. Your child can stop taking part at any time if he/she feels uncomfortable. Having your child take part in this study will not cost you any money.

#### **Will people know that my child participated in this project?**

The only people who will see the information that your child personally creates or shares during the discussion group sessions are research project staff. The paintings your child creates, in addition to the writings, drawings, and photographs, will though be displayed as part of the collaged public exhibit. We will only include the materials that your child chooses to contribute to the final exhibit. Since the group discussion sessions about paintings and drawings will be audio-taped, your child will be asked to pick a nickname and she/he will be called by this name during the project sessions. All information gathered from the audio recorders will be kept in locked cabinets that only project staff will have access to. Your child's name will not be used when the study findings are presentations, or during the exhibition of the

Page 2 of 5



University Of  
Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review  
Board

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Renewal Date: 11/8/2013

IRB #: PRO12080471

final collage. Permission is necessary, gathered in the additional Photographic Consent Form, before any of the photographs will be included in the final project exhibition.

In addition to the investigators listed on the first page of this consent form and their research staff, the following individuals will or may have access to identifiable information related to your child's participation in this research study: Authorized representatives of the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office may review your child's identifiable research information for the purpose of monitoring the appropriate conduct of this research study. In unusual cases, the investigators may be required to release identifiable information related to your child's participation in this research study in response to an order from a court of law. If the investigators learn that your child or someone with whom your child is involved is in serious danger or potential harm, they will need to inform, as required by Pennsylvania law, the appropriate agencies.

**Does my child have to participate? Can he/she stop being a part of this project whenever he/she may chose?**

Your child's involvement in this project is absolutely voluntary, which means that she/he do not have to participate if they do not want to. Your child will have alternative options if for some reason they choose to not participate in this project. If your child does decide to participate, they can stop participating in the project at any time, for any reason.

**Has this study been approved by a group that makes sure the study participants are treated fairly and protected from harm?**

Yes. Studies with human volunteers are reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure protection of the human subjects of this study. The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this study. If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact Michael Yonas at (412) 383-2825. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this study, or if you think your child has been treated unfairly, you should call the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office of the Human Subjects Protection Advocate toll free at 1-866-212-2668.

**What will my child get for participating in this project?**

Each child participating in the research study will receive \$10 for participating in the study, in addition to a celebration party at the end of the final session to thank each child for participating. There will be no cost for you.

**Will my child benefit from participating in this project?**

Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in this project, but he/she will have the opportunity to share thoughts to help create a better Boys and Girls Club. By providing these insightful thoughts and ideas on how to better the community and, specifically, the Shadyside Boy and Girls Club, the researchers anticipated that the participants would help to bring about positive change throughout the community by supporting the promotion of success. Additionally, greater community awareness and overall knowledge of empowerment will be gained throughout the process.

**What if I have questions about the project or my child's participation?**

If you ever have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact: Michael Yonas, at (412) 383-

Page 3 of 5



University Of  
Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review  
Board

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Renewal Date: 11/8/2013

IRB #: PRO12080471



If you are interested in letting your child participate in this project, please read the following Participant Agreement Statement very carefully. Then, if you would still like to participate, please sign and date this form and return it to the principal investigator. You may keep a copy of the form for yourself in case you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

#### PARENT AGREEMENT STATEMENT

The above information has been explained to me all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions, concerns or complaints will be answered by any of the investigators listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number given. I understand that I may always request my questions, concerns, or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator. I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh toll-free at 1-866-212-2668, to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations in the event that the research team is unavailable.

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) is not permitted to participate in this research study without my permission, or consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give my consent for his participation in this research study. By signing this form I give permission for my child to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me. I also understand and agree that unless otherwise notified in writing, the University of Pittsburgh assumes that permission is granted to tape record sessions with my child as well as use photographs taken of my child in the final exhibition of the project and for educational purposes ONLY.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to Participant (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions, concerns or complaints as they arise. I further certify that no research

Page 4 of 5



University Of  
Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review  
Board

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Renewal Date: 11/8/2013

IRB #: PRO12080471

component of this protocol was begun until after this consent form was signed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Role in Research Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**ASSENT: FOR CHILDREN AGE 17 OR YOUNGER WHO ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY ABLE TO SIGN THEIR NAME:**

This research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child-Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Child-Subject

**VERIFICATION OF EXPLANATION:**

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research study to the child/subject in age appropriate language. He has had an opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his questions and he has provided affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Page 5 of 5



University Of  
Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review  
Board

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Renewal Date: 11/8/2013

IRB #: PRO12080471

## A.2 PHOTO RELEASE FORM

### RELEASE for PHOTOGRAPHS

Title of Project: "Assessing the impact of a community center in an urban setting using Community Based Participatory applications."

Investigators: Lane Hume, Jeffrey Howell, and Michael Yonas (Mentor)

We may wish to use photographs of you and/or your child during your participation in this research study for the purpose of recording and describing this project. These images may appear in academic publications, presentations given at academic conferences, or in a public setting at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club. These photographs may also appear in newspapers or newsletters.

I give permission for photographs of me and my child, in connection with this research study, to be used for the purposes described above. I give permission for the University of Pittsburgh to use said photographed and/or recorded materials in university publications, or other publications, web sites, presentations, or other media in any non-commercial manner that it chooses. I hereby waive and release any rights that my child may have to or in said, photographed, and/or recorded materials.

Your child can still participate in the research study even if you do not sign this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Page 1 of 1



University Of Pittsburgh  
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: «Approval Date»  
Renewal Date: «Renewal Date»

IRB #: «IRBNo»

### A.3 LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM THE SHADYSIDE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS**  
OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

#### **SHADYSIDE BRANCH**

6 Brownell Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15232  
(412) 681-8575/ Fax (412) 681-4885  
www.bgcwpa.org

To Whom It May Concern:

#### **OFFICERS:**

Louis Tassari  
Chairperson

Ralph Borsani  
Vice Chairperson

Jon Kasunic  
Treasurer

Larry King  
Secretary

#### **Board Members:**

Joanne Borsani  
Doug Cameron  
Cheryl Doubt  
Edmund Effort, D.D.S.  
Elaine Effort  
Richard Fitzgerald  
Judge Joseph James  
Carl Rueter, Esq.  
Robert Senko  
Karen H. B. Stanton  
Stephanie Stewart  
Marcy Nord Supowitz  
David Young, M.Ed.

#### **Staff:**

Thomas M. Yandora  
Executive Director

Dave DiGirolamo  
Assistant Executive Director

I have been in constant communication with Jeff Howell and Lane Hume in regards to their Master's Thesis research project: Assessing the impact of a community center in an urban center using Community Based Participatory Research applications.

In particular, I am aware that Jeff and Lane will be working directly with their mentor, Dr. Michael Yonas, while using a novelty idea of his, Visual Voices. With Visual Voices, I am aware that the children participating in the study will be describing experiences and opinions of how to better provide for them.

I have allowed Jeff and Lane permission to conduct this data collection procedure of this research study on Shadyside Boys & Girls Club's premises, in particular, the Art Room and a conference room on-site.

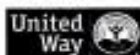
I completely support Jeff and Lane's research project and am aware that there is minimal, if not less than minimal, risk to the participants of this project. In case of an emergency, Lane and Jeff will work directly with my staff and under our procedures for emergencies.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dave DiGirolamo

Executive Director



United Way of Allegheny County

AWARD FOR  
EXCELLENCE

**GREAT FUTURES START HERE.**

Member Boys & Girls Clubs of America

## **A.4 APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**



**University of Pittsburgh**  
***Institutional Review Board***

3500 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
[\(412\) 383-1480](tel:412-383-1480)  
[\(412\) 383-1508 \(fax\)](tel:412-383-1508)  
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

### **Memorandum**

To: Jeffrey Howell  
From: Christopher Ryan, PhD, Vice Chair  
Date: 11/9/2012

IRB#: [PRO12080471](#)

Subject: Assessing the impact of a community center in an urban neighborhood.

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The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced study by the expedited review procedure authorized under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Your research study was approved under:  
45 CFR 46.110.(6)  
45 CFR 46.110.(7)

The IRB has approved the advertisement that was submitted for review as written. As a reminder, any changes to the approved advertisement would require IRB approval prior to distribution.

The risk level designation is Minimal Risk.

Approval Date: 11/9/2012  
Expiration Date: 11/8/2013

For studies being conducted in UPMC facilities, no clinical activities can be undertaken by investigators until they have received approval from the UPMC Fiscal Review Office.

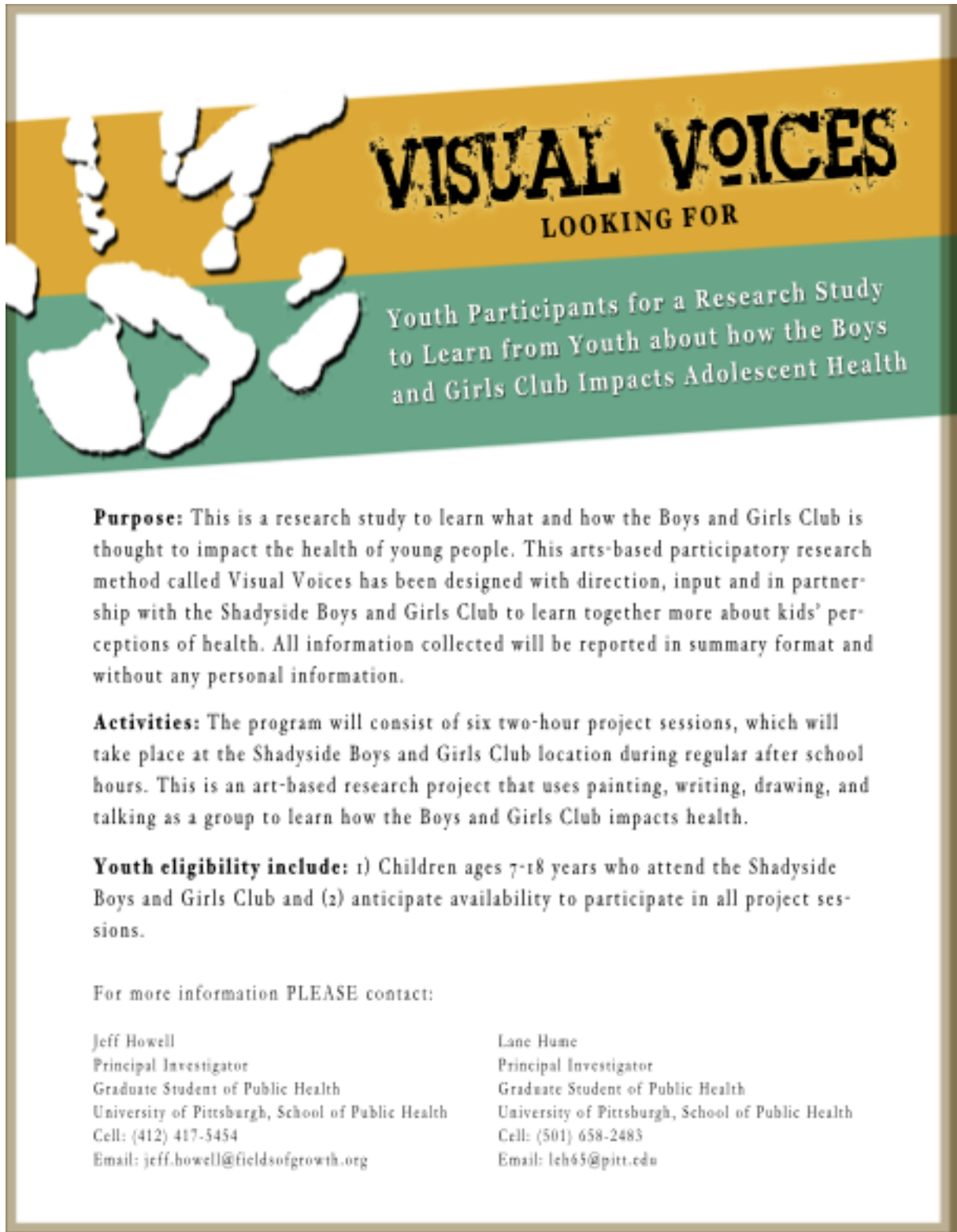
Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others [see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5) and 21 CFR 56.108(b)]. Refer to the IRB Policy and Procedure Manual regarding the reporting requirements for unanticipated problems which include, but are not limited to, adverse events. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Adverse Events Coordinator at [412-383-1480](tel:412-383-1480).

The protocol and consent forms, along with a brief progress report must be resubmitted at least one month prior to the renewal date noted above as required by FWA00006790 (University of Pittsburgh), FWA00006735 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), FWA00000600 (Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh), FWA00003567 (Magee-Womens Health Corporation), FWA00003338 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Institute).

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.



## A.5 DESCRIPTIVE FLYER OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The flyer features a stylized world map in white on a green background, with an orange banner across the top. The title 'VISUAL VOICES' is in large, bold, black letters, with 'LOOKING FOR' in smaller letters below it. The subtitle is in a green, slightly distressed font. The main text is in a black serif font. The contact information is in a black serif font, with two columns of text.

**VISUAL VOICES**  
**LOOKING FOR**

Youth Participants for a Research Study  
to Learn from Youth about how the Boys  
and Girls Club Impacts Adolescent Health

**Purpose:** This is a research study to learn what and how the Boys and Girls Club is thought to impact the health of young people. This arts-based participatory research method called Visual Voices has been designed with direction, input and in partnership with the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club to learn together more about kids' perceptions of health. All information collected will be reported in summary format and without any personal information.

**Activities:** The program will consist of six two-hour project sessions, which will take place at the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club location during regular after school hours. This is an art-based research project that uses painting, writing, drawing, and talking as a group to learn how the Boys and Girls Club impacts health.

**Youth eligibility include:** 1) Children ages 7-18 years who attend the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club and (2) anticipate availability to participate in all project sessions.

For more information PLEASE contact:

Jeff Howell	Lane Hume
Principal Investigator	Principal Investigator
Graduate Student of Public Health	Graduate Student of Public Health
University of Pittsburgh, School of Public Health	University of Pittsburgh, School of Public Health
Cell: (412) 417-5454	Cell: (501) 658-2483
Email: jeff.howell@fieldsofgrowth.org	Email: leh65@pitt.edu

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